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SUBJECT: ELECTION UPDATE: CORREA MOVES INTO SECOND PLACE

REF: STATE 146216

Classified By: PolChief Erik Hall for reasons 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary: Radical populist candidate Rafael Correa surged ahead of Social Christian candidate Cynthia Viteri in recent polls, moving into second place after front-runner Leon Roldos. With first round presidential elections just a month away on October 15, undecided voters have declined to around 50%, and the reduction appears to favor Correa over Viteri or Roldos. Most polls show Roldos leading with around 20% support, followed by Correa with 15-17%, and Viteri declining to 13-14%. No candidate is expected to win outright in the first round; the second round presidential runoff election will take place between the top two candidates on November 26.

12. (SBU) Correa's recent visit to New York permitted him to trumpet his economic nationalist agenda, while accusing the Minister of Defense, an ally of former president Leon Febres Cordero, of planning to use the military to commit election fraud. Correa's rise appears to be rattling the other front-runners. Roldos changed his campaign manager, reiterated his pledge not to renew the Manta FOL agreement, and threatened to terminate the agreement if ATPDEA is not extended. Rightist candidate Viteri promptly trumpeted her contacts with the Cuban Ambassador. Meanwhile, key election contracts have been awarded to Brazil and Spain, not Venezuela. End Summary.

Correa Moves Into Second Place  
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13. (SBU) Recently released presidential polls from several generally reliable polling organizations show New Country movement candidate Rafael Correa rising past Viteri into second place behind front-runner Leon Roldos.

Polls Show Undecided Slowly Declining, Favoring Correa  
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14. (SBU) A recent Cedatos poll shows the proportion of undecided voters has declined from 71% to 55% over the past six months. This shift coincides with Correa's gradual rise in the polls. Current poll results (Cedatos, "Informe Confidencial," and Market):

-- Leon Roldos (22%, 20%, 22.8%)  
-- Rafael Correa (17%, 15%, 14.1%)  
-- Cynthia Viteri (15%, 13%, 12%)  
-- Alvaro Noboa (10%, 11%, 8.1%)  
-- Gilmar Gutierrez (N/A, 4%, 2.9%)

Correa's Visit to NYC Gets Attention

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¶15. (SBU) While visiting New York to meet with overseas Ecuadorian voters, Correa publicly rejected an FTA with the United States. He asserted that dollarization had been a "big mistake," but that he would not reverse it. He said he would honor "legitimate" foreign debt but pay it back "at Ecuador's rhythm." Correa also accused new Defense Minister Marcelo Delgado of planning electoral fraud on behalf of PSC leader Leon Febres Cordero in the upcoming elections. The military is charged with providing security for the electoral process. Delgado and President Palacio immediately refuted the charge. Correa's campaign is reportedly increasingly well-funded; supporting that claim, the news director of a top TV station told us that Correa had booked a week of prime-time for a new 15-minute biographic spot.

Roldos and Viteri Rattled  
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¶16. (SBU) Viteri made headlines on September 15 by using a public Internet chat to reveal her positive contacts with both the U.S. and Cuban Ambassadors. Viteri's comments on the latter made the headline, when Viteri expressed confidence that Cuba could help Ecuador improve its literacy rates (already over 90%). She also affirmed she would immediately pursue negotiations of an FTA agreement with the U.S., while considering the benefits of a renewal of the Manta agreement.

¶17. (SBU) For his part, Roldos fired his campaign manager and declared the replacement would pursue a more radical campaign line. Roldos reiterated to journalists his opposition to renewal of the Manta FOL accord, and his determination to end the accord if the U.S. Congress does not renew ATPDEA

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benefits for Ecuador.

Key Election Contracts to Spain and Brazil, not Venezuela  
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¶18. (C) There will be no electronic vote during upcoming elections, since Brazil's voting machines will be needed in Brazil during the same time frame. Contrary to early media speculation, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal did not replace Brazil's machines with Venezuela's. The Tribunal awarded a \$5.2 m. contract for the quick tabulating of election results to a consortium called "E-vote," which includes participation by Brazilian firms Probank and Via Telecom. The Spanish firm Infoadex, which missed deadlines for quick count reporting in 2002, was awarded a \$500K contract to monitor election campaign spending.

Comment  
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¶19. (C) Correa has successfully positioned himself as the leading "change" candidate, and his rise appears to be coming primarily at Viteri's expense. Correa's hard-hitting attacks on Leon Febres Cordero and his demands for radical change contrast sharply with Viteri's feel-good campaign spots. Rather than counter-attacking, Viteri and Roldos appear to be burnishing their own leftist or nationalist credentials.  
JEWELL